Guide to your new home

A practical guide to looking after your new home

NHBC

Raising Standards. Protecting Homeowners

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Congratulations

Buying a house is probably the largest investment you'll ever make, so choosing a new home built by an NHBC registered builder is a wise decision.

NHBC is the UK's leading independent standard-setting body and provider of warranty and insurance for new homes. Our role is to work with the house-building industry to help maintain and raise the build quality of new homes for homebuyers. This also means you will benefit from the protection of our 10-year Buildmark warranty and insurance cover.

During the buying process

Your solicitor or conveyancer will tell you about any planning restrictions, restrictive covenants, tree preservation orders, and the ownership and maintenance of fences, shared drives, etc. They should also explain your rights under Buildmark and provide you with your policy book and certificate. If you do not receive your Buildmark documents, ask your solicitor for them.

A fair process for buying your new home

The Consumer Code for Home Builders was developed by the house-building industry to make the home-buying process fairer and more transparent for purchasers. It aims to ensure that all buyers are treated fairly, know what levels of service to expect, are fully informed about their purchase and their consumer rights before and after they move in, and are provided with a speedy, low-cost dispute resolution scheme to deal with complaints.

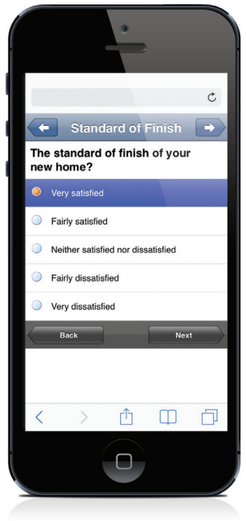
More details can be found on the website **www.consumercodeforhomebuilders.com**.

CONSUMER CODE FOR HOME BUILDERS

Visit **www.nhbc.co.uk**
or call **0800 035 6422**

Your help to improve standards

Once you've moved in, we would like you to tell us about your home-buying experience and help us in our role to continually improve house-building standards for homeowners like yourself. We are interested in the service you have received from your builder as well as the actual quality of your new home.



NHBC carries out two surveys

The first is conducted on behalf of the Home Builders Federation (HBF). You may receive a questionnaire about eight weeks after you have moved in. As well as informing both NHBC and your builder of where they need to direct their efforts to improve, this survey is used to monitor the effectiveness of the Consumer Code for Home Builders. It asks about your experience of the buying process, your moving-in day, and the early after-sales service you received from your builder.

The second survey will come to you about nine months after you move in. By this time, you should be settled into your new home and have resolved any issues that may have arisen. This survey focuses more on the after-sales service you received from your builder.

Please look out for these surveys. They have been kept short so that it should take a matter of minutes to complete. We very much appreciate your feedback. Our experience shows that providing feedback is a proven way of improving levels of customer satisfaction.

Moving in – excited?

Moving-in days are inevitably busy – but try not to let all that excitement distract you from some of the more important tasks in hand.

On moving day, take care to protect your new floor finishes from dirty or potentially damaging footwear. Before you start filling your home, you need to inspect it carefully, making sure any potential defects and deficiencies are noted.

Pay particular attention to:

- sanitary ware (including baths, basins and WCs)
- glass (including windows, mirrors and shower screens)
- fireplace surrounds
- kitchen fittings and appliances
- wall tiling
- carpets, floor tiling and laminated flooring.

Carefully inspecting your home on moving-in day makes it easier for the builder to put right any defects you may find. Later on, it might be impossible to prove who caused them, so you need to note them now before signing any forms provided by your builder.

However, it's important to remember that, during the first two years after you complete the purchase, your builder still has a responsibility to put right defects that you could not reasonably have been expected to see at the time of moving in, or those that develop later down the line.

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or call **0800 035 6422**

As well as checking your home, you should also confirm that:

- all keys have been handed over (including those for windows)
- all windows and doors open, close and lock properly
- any 'extras' you ordered have been provided
- all services (gas, water and electricity) are connected and are in working order (you should also agree meter readings).

And you are in...

The curtains are up, your TV is in place and the house-warming gifts are flooding in. The moving process is complete and you can start to relax. Over the coming weeks, you can gradually adjust to life in your new home and begin building memories.

The first few days

Over the coming days, you should carry out several tests and checks to make sure everything's in order:

- Familiarise yourself with the operation of your smoke alarms and check they work by pressing the button.
- Ensure you have been given operating instructions for all systems and appliances.
- Check that the garden boundaries are as you expected.
- If you have purchased a flat or apartment, make sure that the common areas have been completed by the builder. Your solicitor or conveyancer should have told you what these are, but they usually include stairways, landings and entrance areas.
- If a chimney or flue has been installed in your home, check that a notice plate, which gives information on types of appliances that can be safely installed and used, has been provided. If you use your chimney or flue, consider buying a fireguard that complies with BS 8423:2010.

Standards of finish

Each and every house is different – that's what makes a house a home. Yours has been individually built and handcrafted by human beings, not robots! That means there will inevitably be some variation in the finished appearance of different elements of the construction. This is due to the nature of the materials and the ways in which they are applied. Slight variations are normal and to be expected – complete uniformity is quite rare.

However, there are certain standards of finish that are to be expected. NHBC issues technical guidance to its inspection and claims staff, as well as to its registered builders, to help explain what is acceptable and what is not. You can find this in Chapter 1.2 of the NHBC Standards book. This chapter covers brickwork, internal plaster, render and paintwork, as well as the effects of drying out.

If you feel that an element of your new home is not finished to the required standard, please get in touch with your builder.

To receive a free copy of *NHBC Standards Chapter 1.2 'A consistent approach to finishes'*, please contact NHBC on **0844 633 1000** and ask for **'Customer Services'**, or you can download this from our website: **www.nhbc.co.uk/Homeowners/Publications/**.

Settling into your home

Like most new things, a home needs to be taken care of. In the first few months, it's especially important that your home is allowed to 'settle' – this includes allowing it to dry out gently.

During this period, you may notice minor cracks in walls, gaps in joinery and white deposits on the walls – all are completely normal in new homes, and may occur regardless of the measures you take to ensure that they do not. However, you can certainly reduce the chance of this happening by following the steps outlined in this section.

Drying out

Small cracks in the walls and gaps in joinery are both common signs of shrinkage. This happens when timbers and other materials contract as they dry out. It's extremely unlikely that these cracks are anything structurally significant, and they can normally be put right very easily with ordinary filler and a simple lick of paint during routine redecoration.

To keep cracks and gaps to a minimum, you need to allow all the materials used in constructing your home to dry out gradually. Shrinkage is accelerated by heat, so you need to be sparing with it. Try to keep an even temperature throughout your home and, if you move in during the winter months, don't be tempted to turn the central heating up to its highest setting.

Leaving your windows open (or at least the vents within their frames) will help to ventilate your home and allow moisture to evaporate more naturally.

The length of time your house takes to dry out depends on how it was built and what sort of weather conditions there are when you first move in. Generally speaking, it will take around nine months to a year.

Efflorescence

The appearance of a white deposit on the wall (known as efflorescence) can also be an effect of the drying-out process. These white deposits are actually natural salts that come out of the wall materials, and are quite normal. These salts are not harmful and usually disappear over time, and where they appear on internal walls, they can be brushed or wiped away. However, if the white deposits continue to appear on internal walls, it could indicate something more serious, such as a water leak. If that's the case, you need to contact your builder or a competent tradesperson as soon as possible.

Condensation

Condensation is caused by steam or water vapour coming into contact with cold surfaces, such as walls, ceilings and windows. Condensation can be the result of evaporation of moisture from building materials, which is quite common in new homes. If allowed to persist, condensation can result in the appearance of mould on interior surfaces and even on furnishings.

Condensation will gradually reduce as the building dries out, but you should avoid contributing to it if you want prevent the appearance of mould on walls and ceilings. There are a number of things you can do, even after the building itself has finished drying out, to protect your home against harmful levels of condensation:

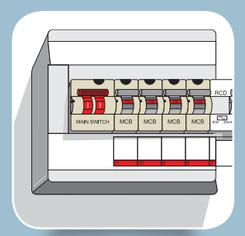
- Open windows or window vents to allow trapped moisture to escape.
- If a mechanical ventilation or heat recovery (MVHR) system has been installed in your home, ensure that you familiarise yourself with the manual and manufacturer's guidance. It is important to understand how these systems operate in order to run your home effectively.
- Cover pans when cooking to reduce steam and use the extractor fan where possible.
- Always use the extractor fan when bathing or taking a shower.
- Stop moist air spreading around your home by keeping doors closed when cooking or bathing.
- Avoid drying clothes indoors, especially on radiators.
- If you have one, make sure your tumble dryer's venting duct leads outside (unless it is a self-condensing dryer).
- Heat your home evenly and consistently. Ideally, you shouldn't leave your heating off all day, as when you return home in the evening and start cooking or washing, moist warm air will be created, which will settle on the cold surfaces and create condensation. Program your central heating to come on shortly before you return.

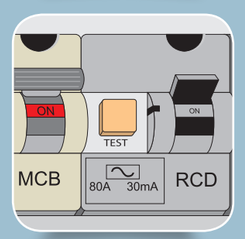
Don't let condensation mould become a problem. Preventing it is much easier than getting rid of it!

Condensation in your roof space

In cold weather, you may notice some moisture on the underside of the felt beneath your roof tiles. This is due to any warm, moist air from your home passing into the roof space and settling on the cold surface of the felt and timbers. As the roof space is ventilated/breathable, this should gradually disperse without any issues arising, and following the general tips on reducing condensation will help keep any moist air that does escape into the roof down to a minimum.

Essential services





Electricity

Where does it come from?

Electricity is normally supplied via an underground cable, which is connected to your meter (used for measuring energy consumption in kWh). In some cases, electricity may be sourced directly from an on-site generator such as a wind turbine, solar panel or combined heat and power (CHP) unit.

How does it work?

From the meter, cables run out to your consumer unit (often referred to as a fuse box). This contains the main on/off switch and a number of miniature circuit breakers (MCBs), which protect individual circuits. An MCB will automatically disconnect the supply of electricity if one of the circuits is overloaded or there is a fault. You can reset an MCB by simply switching it back to the 'on' position.

A consumer unit will also often contain a residual current device (RCD), which provides additional shock protection. An RCD which has 'tripped' can be reset by returning the switch to the 'on' position. RCDs should be periodically tested to ensure they are functioning correctly: you can do this by pressing the 'test' button.

WARNING: If an MCB or RCD trips repeatedly, there may be a fault with an appliance or the installation. You should contact a professional electrician for help.

From the consumer unit, electricity is distributed around your home via a series of cables. These are usually concealed within walls or under floors. Cables above a ceiling or under a floor may be run in any position, but those found in walls should have been installed by your builder as follows:

- Vertically above or below a socket outlet or switch being served.
- Horizontally on either side of the socket or switch.
- Horizontally in a band within 150mm (6") of the ceiling.
- Vertically in a band within 150mm (6") of the corner of a room in each wall.

Water

Where does it come from?
Water is supplied by a regional water company through an underground service pipe. This pipe is fitted with a stop valve, which can be found at the boundary of your property. Its position allows the water company to turn off the supply in an emergency or for maintenance. Please make a note of the precise location of your stop valve. You may also have one within your home - make a note of this location too (often under the kitchen sink).

In some cases, water may be sourced directly from an on-site rain or waste-water harvester – water collected this way is often used for flushing toilets.

How does it work?
From the stop valve, water enters the 'rising main' and is distributed around the home via a direct or indirect feed system.

So what's the difference between a direct and indirect feed system?
In a **direct feed system**, all cold water taps and WC cisterns are fed directly from the rising main. Hot water is provided at mains pressure by an unvented hot water storage system or a combination boiler.

In an **indirect feed system**, the rising main supplies water to a storage cistern, which is usually installed in the loft. From here, water is redistributed to the taps, WCs and the hot water cylinder. However, in most cases, the kitchen tap will still be directly connected to the rising main (for drinking water).

Which do I have?
To find out which type of water feed system you have, all you need to do is close the main stop valve. If the system is direct, the flow will stop all cold water taps and WCs; if indirect, only the kitchen sink will be affected.

Gas

Where does it come from?
Gas is supplied by an energy company and enters your home through a service pipe that terminates at the control valve, which can be found next to the meter. The meter, which is usually installed outside the building (either on a wall or partially buried in the ground), is used to measure gas consumption in cubic metres or cubic feet. Your builder should have given you a key that opens the meter cupboard so you can read the meter or close the control valve in an emergency.

How does it work?
Gas is fed to the central heating boiler and other gas appliances (such as an oven) through pipework, which may be concealed within walls and under floors.

WARNING: You should always contact a professional gas engineer who is listed on the **Gas Safe Register** to deal with problems with your gas supply or appliances.

Central heating

With a better understanding of your central heating system, you can:

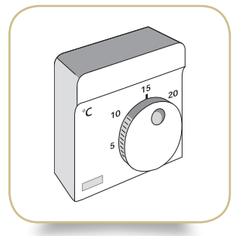
- improve thermal efficiency
- lower your energy costs
- reduce your carbon footprint.

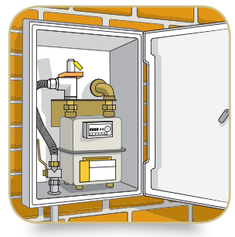
How does it work?
Most new homes are fitted with a hot water central heating system which consists of a boiler, radiators, a pump and several controls. Water heated by the boiler is pumped around the radiators through pipework that is usually concealed within the floors and walls.

Some central heating systems may include a ground or air source heat pump, a biomass boiler/burner, or even solar panels/tiles. Your builder will have informed you if you have any of these systems in place.

Operating instructions for your central heating system should have been provided by your builder. If not, you should ask for them.

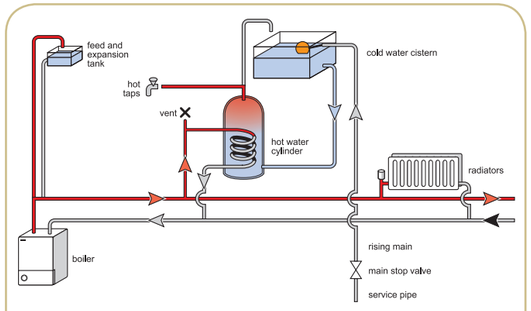
Boilers will usually have a programmer that allows you to turn the heating on and off, and to adjust the settings to suit your requirements. You can easily program the heating to stay on for longer in the colder winter months. A room thermostat and/or thermostatic radiator valves are normally provided to regulate individual room temperatures.



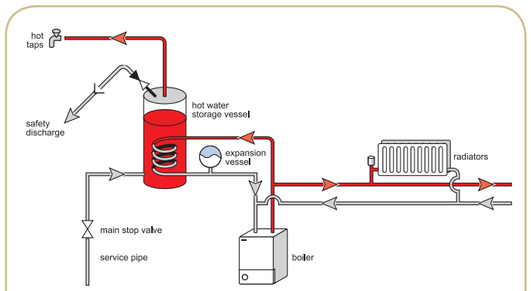


Watch out for hidden cables and pipes

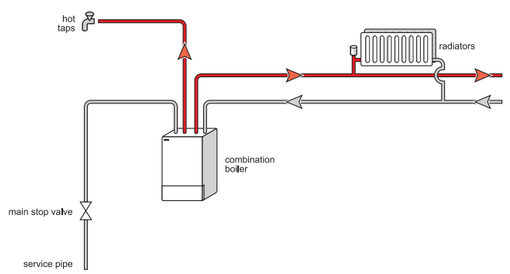
WARNING: Always take care to establish the exact position of cables and pipes which are embedded in walls or under floorboards. You can do this using a cable detector.



Central heating system with hot water cylinder



Central heating system with hot water storage vessel



Central heating system using a combination boiler

Types of central heating system
There are generally two types of central heating system: those with a hot water cylinder, and those without one.

In central heating systems that have a hot water cylinder or storage vessel, water that is heated by the boiler is also circulated through a coil to heat the water within the cylinder. Water from the cylinder is then distributed to the hot taps around the home. The temperature of the water provided from the taps can usually be adjusted using the cylinder thermostat.

Central heating systems that use a combination boiler **do not have a hot water cylinder**. This is because the boiler takes water directly from the rising main, heats it, and distributes it directly to the hot taps as and when needed. A control found on the boiler allows you to set the temperature of the water that comes out of the hot taps.

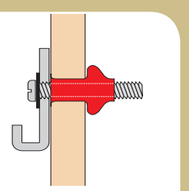
Repairs and maintenance
Most repair and maintenance work ought to be carried out by a professional engineer. However, there are one or two things you may be able to do yourself, such as:

- bleed your radiators
- repressurise your central heating system.

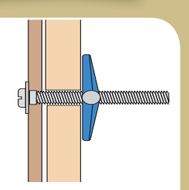
How to...

Extreme care needs to be taken when carrying out work around your home. Even if you're just hanging a picture or putting up shelves, there might be electrical devices, gas pipes and/or cabling in the way. So, before you start drilling holes or hammering in nails, always take care to establish the exact position of cables which are embedded in walls or under floorboards. You can do this using a cable detector.

...attach a wall fixing



Expanding plug

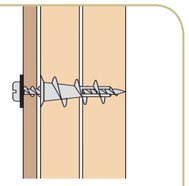


Cavity toggle

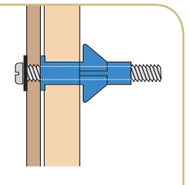
As you settle into your new home, you will want to start adding the finishing touches, such as pictures, posters and shelves, but before you go drilling holes into the walls, you need to know what sort of fixing you'll need. The type of wall fixing that you use depends on the weight of the item you want to hang and the construction of the wall that you want it to hang from. Here's an overview of what to use, where to use it and how to use it. Before fixing to walls, always remember to check for hidden pipes and cables using a detector – these can be purchased from any DIY store.

In masonry (blockwork) walls
These are the strongest walls in your home and can therefore support heavier items. Here, you'll need screws with wall plugs, and you will need to ensure that both the screw and plug penetrate right through the plasterboard and deep into the blockwork.

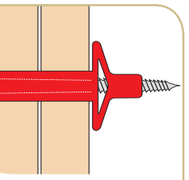
In timber frame walls
Timber frame walls can also support heavier items, so long as the fixings are attached to the timbers within the wall and not just the plasterboard. Vertical timber studs are typically found at 600mm spacing across the width of the wall, but you should use a detector to determine their exact position (the detector will be pick up the metal fixings). If the studs are not in a suitable position, you might find it necessary to spread the load by screwing a piece of wood between the two studs and fixing directly onto that instead.



Self-drill fixing



Steel cavity fixing



Rivet anchor/toggle

If the timber studs are not in a suitable location and the item you are wishing to hang is lightweight, proprietary products are available from DIY stores that may be suitable.

In proprietary partition walls
Partition walls are not suitable for heavy items; however, they can accommodate relatively light loads, providing you use the right fixing device (available from DIY stores). Some proprietary partition walls are not suitable for any fixings – if in doubt, check with your builder.

Unsure as to which walls are masonry and which are partitions? Your floor plan may indicate this but, if not, check with your builder.

...attach a floor fixing

From time to time, you might find the need for a floor fixing. As you might expect, you need to choose the right fixing depending on the type of floor you want to fix it to. Here's an overview of what to use and where to use it.

Before inserting a fixing into the floor, always remember to check for hidden pipes and cables using a detector. If you are in a flat/apartment, you should check with your managing agent/landlord first.

Boarded floors
Boarded floors only require ordinary woodscrews. However, you should make sure they're not particularly long ones, since you don't want to penetrate through to the underside of the board – this could potentially damage pipes or cables located in the floor.

Concrete or screeded floors
These require a standard wall plug and screw, which can be picked up from just about any DIY shop.

Separating ('party') floors
Separating floors are usually found in flats or apartments. They are often designed with a 'floating' top layer in order to reduce the passage of sound. Always think carefully about the necessity of fixing something to these types of floors. If it can't be avoided, it's essential that your fixing is short enough so that it does not connect the floating layer to the structural floor, as this could reduce the effectiveness of the floor construction in relation to sound transmission.

Can't tell your boarded floors from your concrete ones? Your floor plan may indicate this but, if in doubt, check with your builder.

...decorate your home

We certainly don't want to take the fun out of personalising your home, but we do want to make sure you get things right. So here are a few things to take note of.

Painting and wallpapering
If you've just moved in and your house is brand new, your walls will probably be decorated with emulsion paint. You might be happy with the colour but, if not, ideally, you should wait until the drying-out process is complete before repainting or wallpapering. Decorating at an early stage would only be a waste of time and money; until the house is properly settled and the drying-out process is complete (which usually takes nine months to a year), small shrinkage cracks may continue to appear in the walls – which, by the way, are completely normal in new homes.

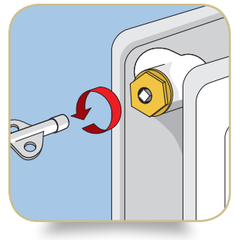
When the time comes, make sure you fill in any minor gaps and plaster cracks with a decorator's filler.

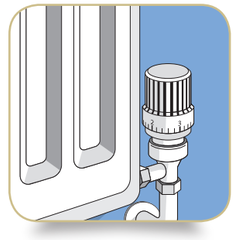
Before painting or wallpapering, you should remove any existing wallpaper from the walls. Use a steamer and avoid scraping too rigorously – otherwise, you might damage the plasterboard.

Ceilings
Many ceilings have an Artex or similar plastic compound finish. These should never be sanded or washed. Instead, lightly brush to remove cobwebs and loose particles before painting with one or two coats of emulsion.

Woodwork
New woodwork tends to absorb a lot of paint or stain, so the first painting may not give as good a finish as later repainting. The surface should be cleaned and prepared properly, and be totally dry before you start to coat it.

...bleed a radiator



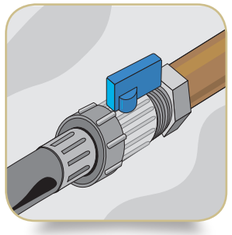


If things start getting a little chilly in your home and you're wondering why, look first to your radiators. It may be that, even with the central heating turned up high, they are failing to deliver the warmth you would expect. If your radiators are cool at the top but warm at the bottom, it's probably because they have air in them and need bleeding.

Bleeding radiators may sound like a messy and complicated affair, but not to worry – it's actually far simpler than it sounds. As long as you're ready with the right tools (a simple valve key and a cloth), it shouldn't take more than a minute for each one. Follow these easy steps and your home will soon be warm and cosy again. If you haven't been given a radiator valve key by your builder, these can be purchased from any DIY store.

1. Turn off your central heating system and allow it to cool down.
2. Attach a radiator key to the bleed valve, usually located at the top and to one end of the radiator, and begin to turn anticlockwise.
3. Keep turning until you hear a slight hiss of air. When water begins to escape instead of air, you know it's time to close the valve, as all of the trapped air has now escaped.
4. Tighten up the valve by turning the key clockwise, turn the heating back on, and enjoy the results!

Throughout this process, you should place a cloth beneath the valve to catch any water that might leak from it, which could discolour floor coverings due to the additives within the heating system.



...connect kitchen appliances

If you've just moved in, your kitchen appliances may already be connected. However, it's still a good idea to check all of the hoses are in line and well tightened before turning the appliance on. You should also recheck connections when the appliances have been up and running after a day or two, as dripping connections can give rise to significant damage over time.

The same applies when you have a new appliance installed at a later date. The plumber may have connected everything up, but there's no harm in having a quick look to make sure.

Of course, checking everything's in order becomes much more important if you've connected your kitchen appliances yourself.

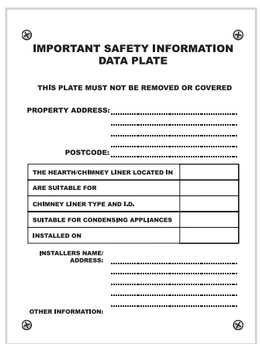
...repressurise a sealed central heating system

Some central heating systems have a small header tank, usually located in the loft, and will not need repressurising. Other systems, known as 'sealed' systems, don't have a header tank, but instead have a pressure vessel, either inside or close to the boiler, along with a pressure gauge. If you have this type of system, sometimes you might find that the pressure drops.

The manual for your boiler should tell you what the correct pressure should be. It should also give instructions on how to repressurise the system.

...install a new heating appliance

If you're thinking of installing a new heating appliance, you need to make sure that it is suitable for use with your chimney or flue (if you have one). There should be a notice plate in place that tells you which types of appliances can be safely installed and used. If you need any advice, you should contact either your builder or one of the following organisations:



IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION
DATA PLATE

THIS PLATE MUST NOT BE REMOVED OR COVERED

PROPERTY ADDRESS: .....
.....
.....
POSTCODE: .....

THE HEARTH/CHIMNEY LINER LOCATED IN	
ARE SUITABLE FOR	
CHIMNEY LINER TYPE AND I.D.	
SUITABLE FOR CONDENSING APPLIANCES	
INSTALLED ON	

INSTALLERS NAME/ ADDRESS: .....
.....
.....
.....
.....
OTHER INFORMATION: .....

- Gas Safe Register for gas appliances.
- Oil Firing Technical Association for the Petroleum Industry (OFTEC) for oil fired appliances.
- Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme (HETAS LTD) for solid fuel appliances.

Appliances pre-installed by your builder should be suitable for the chimney or flue you have in place.

Fixed flueless gas appliances
Some modern gas heaters (fixed flueless gas appliances) are not connected to a chimney or flue. It is important that these are operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. They are not suitable as the principal heat source.

Home safety

Home safety should never be overlooked. It's really important that you think ahead and familiarise yourself with any safety equipment or systems that exist in your home – a thorough understanding could make all the difference in an emergency situation. And don't leave anything to chance – if there's anything you're unsure about, call your builder.

Here are some home safety issues for you to consider.

Fire safety

Smoke alarms
All new homes are fitted with at least one smoke alarm, and they need regular maintenance. Test each alarm by pressing the button every week and, if it has a backup battery, change this once a year (unless it is a 10-year alarm, in which case it will need replacing at the end of the 10 years). Twice a year (maybe when the clocks change), gently open the cover and clean it carefully, using the brush attachment of your vacuum cleaner to remove dust and other debris. The manufacturer's instructions for your smoke alarm should give you more details.

Escape
It's a good idea to consider how you might escape from your home in the event of a fire. Plan a sensible route, and ensure everyone who lives in your home knows it. Make sure you know the exact location of any keys necessary for escape, and familiarise yourself with the use of your windows – they could be vital in getting out.

Fire doors
Fire doors are significantly heavier than standard internal doors and are sometimes fitted with a self-closing mechanism. If you have these in your home, you should not remove them, disable them or leave them open.

Fire prevention

To avoid a fire breaking out:

- keep matches and lighters out of children's reach
- dispose of cigarettes and smokers materials properly
- switch off appliances when not in use
- do not overload electrical sockets
- look out for damaged cables or wiring
- use a deep fat fryer rather than a chip pan
- make sure candles are kept away from curtains, and extinguish them when leaving the room or going to bed.

Further information is available at **www.gov.uk/firekills**

Electrical safety

Electrical alterations/maintenance
It's quite simple: NEVER carry out electrical alterations or maintenance yourself. It should ALWAYS be done by a competent electrician who really knows what they are doing. You might think you do, but it's simply not worth the risk.

Never interfere with earth bonding cables that are connected to pipework, sinks and radiators. They are there for your safety. Avoid overloading electrical sockets.

Switch off electrical equipment when not in use. Switch off items such as hair straighteners, and put them out of reach of small children.

Do not use electrical appliances with wet hands or in the bathroom.

Renewable energy systems
Systems that generate electricity – including wind turbines, solar photovoltaics (PV) or CHP units – will remain live even when the main switch on the consumer unit is turned off, so particular care should be taken.

Circuit breakers
Your consumer unit contains the main on/off switch for your electricity and has a number of MCBs that protect individual circuits. Tripping of these MCBs may occur due to a faulty appliance. To rule this out, unplug all of the electrical items, reset the switch to the on position and, one by one, plug in the appliances to see which one causes the MCB to trip. The faulty appliance should be repaired or replaced as a priority.

In addition, your home may have an RCD, which provides additional shock protection.

Circuit breakers are there for your safety. If they repeatedly trip, and you have eliminated a faulty appliance, do not persist in resetting an MCB or RCD, as it may be that there is a problem with the electrical installation. Contact your builder or a competent electrician, who will be able to find and repair the fault.

Gas safety

Gas alterations/maintenance
Actual repairs, alterations or servicing of any gas pipes or appliances should always be left to an expert. If you need your boiler serviced, a gas fire installed or any other alterations or repairs that involve gas systems, you should always call a gas engineer who is listed on the **Gas Safe Register**. You can check the register online and get further information about gas safety at **www.gassaferegister.co.uk**.

Gas leaks
Gas leaks can be life threatening and should be dealt with as soon as you become aware of them. If you suspect a gas leak, you should:

- open all doors and windows to ventilate the room
- switch off the appliance and do not use it again until it has been checked by a Gas Safe registered engineer
- turn off the gas at the meter
- call the National Gas Emergency Service:

  England, Scotland and Wales 0800 111 999

  Isle of Man 0808 1624 444

  Northern Ireland 0800 002 001

- not operate electrical switches – whether on or off – they may create a spark that could ignite the gas.

Airflow safety

It's vital that your home is correctly ventilated and that chimneys, flues and air bricks are not blocked or obstructed in any way. A fresh flow of air is not only healthier, but also much safer.

Flue terminals
These should not be covered, blocked or modified in any way, and they should not be enclosed by extensions, such as porches or conservatories.

Combustion ventilation
Gas, oil and solid fuel appliances, such as fireplaces and wood burners, can give off harmful and potentially deadly fumes, such as carbon monoxide. There will almost always be permanent ventilators fitted in the room where these appliances are installed, either in the wall or the floor. These provide air to ensure that the appliance works correctly, and should NEVER be blocked or redirected, as this could cause a build-up of dangerous gases. To reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, all fuel-burning appliances should be serviced in line with manufacturer's recommendations - as a general guide, at least annually.

Unvented hot water storage system safety

Unvented hot water storage systems operate under high pressures and should be serviced annually. You should never attempt to service, adjust or alter them yourself, as this could cause an explosion. Call out a specialist who holds a Registered Operative Identity Card for the installation of unvented hot water storage systems.

Ladder safety

There may be times when you require the use of a ladder to get certain jobs done. It's always a good idea to leave such things to people who really know what they're doing, but if you're confident that you can do it yourself, make sure you remember to:

- only use a ladder when you can be sure it has a safe and secure base to stand on
- ensure the ladder and its rungs are not damaged
- ensure the space around the bottom of your ladder is free from obstacles and sharp objects
- tie the ladder to a rigid fixing to prevent it from slipping
- always work with three points of contact on the ladder (i.e. both feet and one hand)
- never lean beyond your reach – instead, move the ladder and re-tie it
- position the base of the ladder 30cm from the wall for every 1.2m it is vertical (for example, if you're cleaning out the guttering)
- position the base at least 1.2m away from the wall on an average two-storey house (about 5m)
- store a ladder in a place where children will not be tempted to climb it.

Site safety during construction

Construction work may continue on your development when you move into your new home and, unfortunately, a certain amount of dust and noise may be inevitable. Your builders will endeavour to keep any disturbance to a minimum whilst they complete your development.

Here are some key pointers to remember for your own safety as well as your family or visitors to your home, especially young children:

- Please DO NOT enter the construction or work areas at any time, or allow children in your care to do so.
- Children are naturally curious and will want to explore. Please alert your children to the very real dangers on site and, if they're playing outside your home, be sure of their whereabouts.
- Construction traffic may be moving about during the day. Please take care when walking or driving. Before passing any site vehicles, ensure that the driver has seen you.
- Construction vehicles are not easy to manoeuvre and cannot stop quickly. Young children are especially difficult for the drivers to see easily.
- During construction, it may be necessary to alter the site traffic management system. Please take notice of, and abide by, any signs showing safe routes for pedestrians and vehicles.
- Visitors to the construction area must report to the site office and gain permission to proceed onto the site or any work areas – you will also need to wear protective clothing and footwear.
- If you have pets, please be aware of their whereabouts at all times; they may become trapped in the construction areas or cause an accident.
- Please observe and follow safety signs and procedures at all times.
- Footpaths and designated walkways must be kept clear of obstructions at all times. Please do not park in these areas.
- Please do not remove or alter any signs, barriers or safety equipment on site at any time.
- All persons entering the site and construction areas must comply with all of the regulations under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974.

If you experience any settling-in issues during the first few days in your home, please avoid approaching members of the construction team directly for assistance. To ensure that any problem is dealt with in the most efficient manner and recorded correctly, please follow the instructions provided by your builder in relation to reporting problems, or contact their customer care department for assistance.

Home security

Here, you'll find some useful tips and advice to help you keep your home secure and the best use of any security features provided by your builder.

Window locks

Where windows have been fitted with locks, normally on the ground floor and those easily reached by climbing, make sure you use them. Some windows lock automatically at the press of a button and require a key to be opened – always ensure that any keys can easily be located in the event of an emergency.

Rely on your doors

Your front and back doors are fitted with robust locking systems that should always be engaged when you leave the house. You may also have door chains or limiters and/or a spy hole viewer to help you check on callers when you're at home.

Consider a light sensor...

A light fitted with a detection sensor turns on automatically if someone approaches your home after dark. It's highly effective in deterring potential intruders and therefore definitely worth considering if your home doesn't already have it installed.

...and alarm systems

Installing an alarm gives you peace of mind. Speak to your local police crime prevention officer for expert advice and guidance in finding a system that meets your needs.

Be secure, but also safe

Some doors can be locked from the inside. If that's the case with yours, and it's locked using a key, make sure you have a spare key in a convenient place nearby, so that you can get out quickly in an emergency.

Keep ladders and other equipment safe

Ladders, steps and equipment attract the keen eye of the burglar and makes things easy for them, so always ensure that they are kept out of sight, ideally in a locked shed or garage.

Lock rear entry gates

Generally, make sure your back garden is as private and secure as possible. Many burglaries start at the back, where no-one can see them taking place.

And, while you're away...

- Try to make your home look occupied.
- Leave lights on in the evening, and not just in the hall or on the landing.
- Remember to cancel papers and other regular deliveries before going on holiday. A build-up of papers in the letterbox is a telltale sign that nobody's home.
- Ask your neighbour to keep an eye on your home.
- Make sure all valuables and car keys are kept out of sight, and therefore out of mind for the potential burglar.
- Hide small valuables, such as jewellery.
- If you live in a retirement home or sheltered housing, consult the warden or estates manager before fitting security devices, as they may need to access your property in case of an emergency.

Care and maintenance tips

Fitted furniture

Over time, things like doors, drawers, windows and cabinets may require a little adjustment here and there. This is to be expected, and is considered as part of normal maintenance.

Heating systems

Central heating boilers should be checked and serviced at least once a year by a competent maintenance engineer, so that they remain safe. Engineers should be registered with the following organisations, as appropriate for the type of appliance:

- Gas Safe Register for gas appliances.
- OFTEC for oil fired appliances.
- HETAS Ltd for solid fuel appliances.

Visit **www.nhbc.co.uk**
or call **0800 035 6422**

Renewable energy systems

Any renewable technologies installed in your home should be serviced and maintained by a competent person only.

Unvented hot water storage systems

These systems should be serviced at least once a year by a competent installer in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The manufacturer should be able to provide details of an approved installer.

WARNING: Never attempt to service or alter an unvented system yourself. This could result in an explosion.

Water from overflows and warning pipes

If you notice water dripping or flowing from an overflow or warning pipe, you should identify the cause without delay. It may indicate that a valve has developed a fault and needs attention.

Chimneys

To prevent chimney fires and reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, chimneys should be swept at least once a year (unless the notice plate suggests alternative maintenance arrangements).

Gutters

Gutters should be cleaned out at least once a year to remove leaves and debris. Wet patches on the walls below may indicate that gutters or downpipes are blocked.

Flat roofs

Flat roofs should be inspected once a year to ensure that they remain in sound condition. Rainwater outlets should be checked to ensure that they are not blocked.

Paintwork

External finishes will dull over time and, where appropriate, should be washed on a regular basis. Outside woodwork should be regularly repainted or stained to preserve the wood. The first repainting outside will probably be needed in about two years, but after that – provided it is properly done – repainting or staining should only be necessary every four to five years. You may need to do it more often if you live by the sea or in an exposed area.

Lawn care

If you are the proud owner of a newly laid lawn, you may need some tips to help you look after it. Spending a little time and effort now will help you to reap dividends later on. A newly laid turf lawn will need some tender loving care throughout its first season, especially during the summer months. For best results, water your lawn during the coolest times of the day, during the evening or, preferably, early in the morning. Try not to walk on the lawn until the turf is established and the ground is firm, which is when you can begin to mow, keeping the blades of your mower at the highest setting for the first cut. As your lawn grows, you can mow at regular intervals to match the growth rate.

Drives and paths

Gravel, stones and other loose surfaces may be displaced over time. They may need adding to or replacing as part of normal maintenance.

Inspection chambers and rodding eyes are there to provide access to the drainage system below ground so that blockages can be cleared. It is important that these are not covered over by soil, turf or paving.

In soft landscaping, such as lawned areas, some settlement of the ground may occur and should be made good as part of normal maintenance.

Trees and shrubs

Planting trees and shrubs can make your garden more attractive – but be careful: trees and shrubs take moisture from the soil. If the soil is clay, new planting may cause it to shrink, while removing existing trees and shrubs may make it swell. Excessive shrinkage or swelling could damage foundations.

Much depends on the type, size and location of the trees and shrubs, and the type of clay. You should obtain advice from an expert before planting new trees and shrubs, or if a large tree dies or has to be severely pruned.

On clay soils, it is best to avoid planting trees nearer to your home than a distance equal to three-quarters of the mature height of the tree. However, high water demand trees should be planted no closer to the home than one-and-a-quarter times the mature height. High water demand trees include elm, eucalyptus, oak, poplar, willow and some common cypress species.

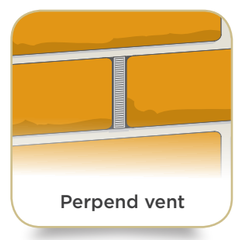
It is also best to avoid planting shrubs such as cotoneaster, ivy, virginia creeper and wisteria closer than 3m to your home. On all soils, allow enough room for trunks and large roots to grow safely, and be particularly careful if you are planting near walls or drains.

Be careful not to plant trees near your neighbour's home. They could cause damage, and you could be liable for the cost of repair. Before cutting down or pruning a mature tree, check with your local authority to make sure that it is not protected by planning conditions, conservation area restrictions or a tree preservation order.

Damp proof courses, air bricks and other ventilators

The level of soil around your home should be kept below the damp proof course (generally 150mm or two brick courses). Paths should also generally be kept around 150mm or two brick courses below the damp proof course, except where these have been designed to provide level access into the home.

If you are not sure where the damp proof course is, ask the builder to show you. Where air bricks, permanent ventilators or perpend vents are provided, they should not be blocked or covered by soil or paving.



Alterations and extensions

So you're thinking of updating your home? Perhaps it's a porch, a conservatory or a double-storey extension. Whatever alterations or extensions you're thinking of making, you should always seek advice from an appropriately qualified structural engineer, building surveyor or architect. You should also refer to your title deeds or lease.

However, it's important to remember that any alterations or extensions to your home will not be covered by NHBC's Buildmark policy; neither will any damage to your home caused by the work undertaken.

Other things to think about:

- All electrical work should be carried out by competent electricians. The National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) and the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) keep a register of approved firms.
- All gas system changes/modifications should be carried out by a gas engineer listed on the Gas Safe Register.
- All roof timbers are necessary for the support of the roof and should not be cut or removed.
- Lofts are not generally intended to be used as a storage space; the structure of the roof is not likely to have been designed to take the additional load of stored items, and the loft insulation may prevent safe access.
- Ventilation is provided to control condensation. If vents have been provided in the eaves, they should not be blocked or covered over.

For guidance on the effect that alterations and extensions may have on your NHBC policy, please call NHBC on **0800 035 6422** and ask for **'Claims'**.

Buildmark

Ten-year warranty and insurance protection provided by your builder and NHBC for extra peace of mind.

Your solicitor will give you your policy documents when you buy your new home, or you can download a copy from our website. It is important that you read the policy carefully when you receive it. In the meantime, the following provides a summary of the protection you can get from Buildmark. This is just a guide. Please refer to the policy document for full details of the cover, terms and conditions that apply to your home.

From exchange of contracts up to the completion date

Buildmark starts right from when you exchange contracts so that your deposit is protected if, for example, the builder becomes insolvent.

The builder warranty, our resolution service and our guarantee – the first two years after the completion date

Your builder will provide the initial warranty on the house for the first two years after the completion date, so if you encounter any problems with your home during this time, just get in touch with them and they will work with you to put things right. We will also be on hand if you need help or advice through our resolution service, if you have a dispute with your builder and we can complete the work if the builder is not able to.

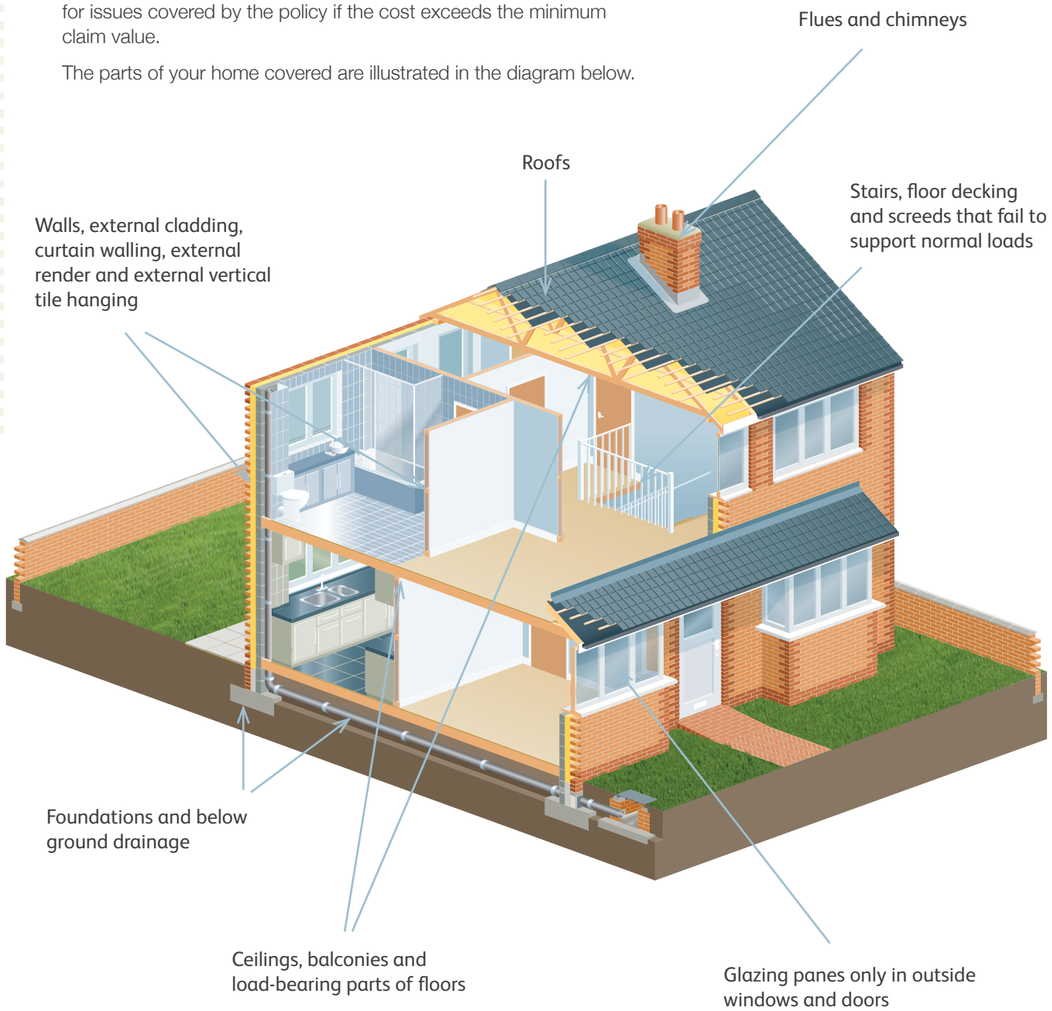
Visit **www.nhbc.co.uk**
or call **0800 035 6422**

Insurance cover – 3 to 10 years after completion

After the builder warranty has ended, your home will continue to be protected by insurance cover provided by NHBC until 10 years after completion.

This means that we will pay the cost or carry out remedial works for issues covered by the policy if the cost exceeds the minimum claim value.

The parts of your home covered are illustrated in the diagram below.


Flues and chimneys
Roofs
Stairs, floor decking and screeds that fail to support normal loads
Walls, external cladding, curtain walling, external render and external vertical tile hanging
Foundations and below ground drainage
Ceilings, balconies and load-bearing parts of floors
Glazing panes only in outside windows and doors

This is for illustration purposes only. There are certain conditions, limits and exclusions that apply. Different periods and conditions also apply to common parts. Please read your policy document for full details about your cover.

Appendix A: How new homes are built

Homes come in all shapes and sizes, and are built in a variety of ways. Two of the most common forms of construction for new homes are shown here. Many other forms of modern construction are available for new homes, whilst newly converted homes may be built in a variety of traditional and modern ways as outlined below.

Masonry cavity construction
With an inner leaf of blocks to support the roof and floors, and an outer wall of bricks (or blocks finished with cladding or render).

Timber frame construction
With an internal load-bearing frame of preservative-treated timber and an outer leaf of bricks. Alternatively, the timber frame may be clad externally with boarding or tile hanging

The builder should have provided you with information telling you, among other things, the type of construction used in your home, including the methods of insulation.

Walls

External masonry walls
Thermal insulation: many new homes have insulation in the cavity of the external walls. The insulation may:

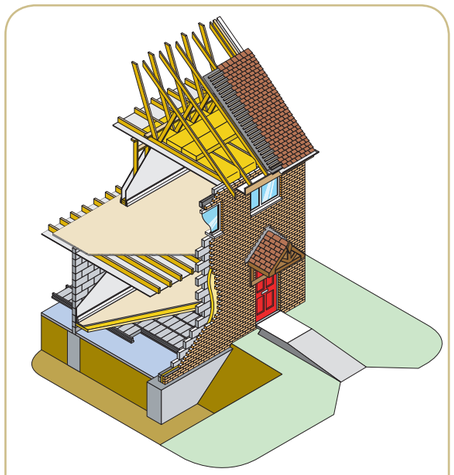
- fully fill the cavity (either as built-in slabs or as an injected material)
- partially fill the cavity (as boards held against the inner block leaf, leaving an air space behind the outer leaf).

The air space behind the outer leaf should not be filled with additional insulation. The walls of homes can be thermally insulated in other ways: for example, with a layer of insulation provided between the inner leaf and the plasterboard dry lining. If your home has an unfilled cavity, you should not have cavity fill insulation injected without seeking professional advice and obtaining Building Regulation approval from your local authority or (in England and Wales) Approved Inspector.

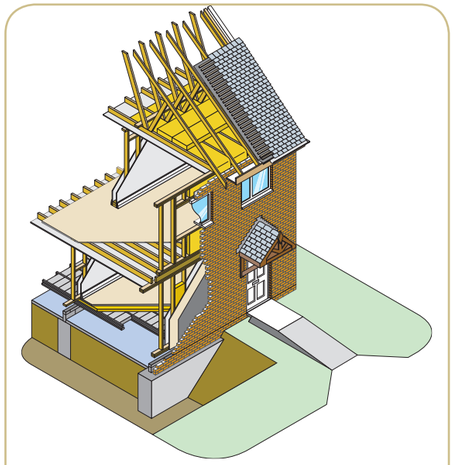
External timber frame walls

- Thermal insulation: timber frame walls are usually insulated within the depth of the load-bearing timber frame, so that any cavity between the frame and the brick outer leaf is kept clear for weather protection and ventilation.

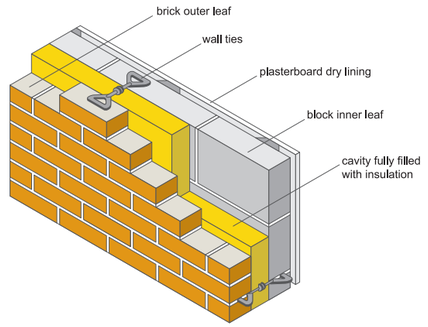
  The cavity of a timber frame home should never be filled with additional insulation.



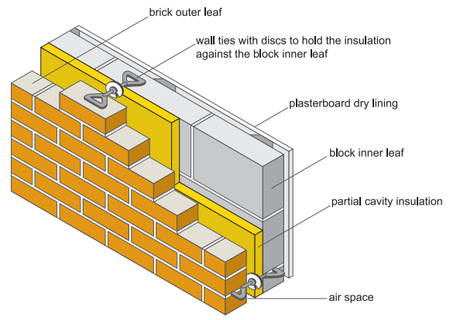
Typical masonry cavity construction



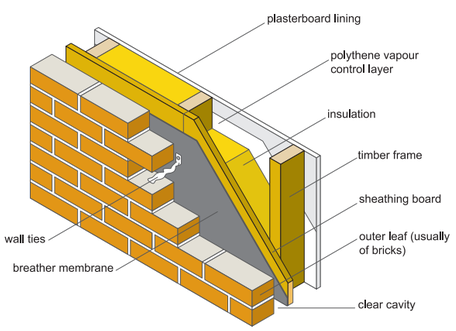
Typical timber frame construction



Cavity fully filled with insulation


brick outer leaf
wall ties with discs to hold the insulation against the block inner leaf
plasterboard dry lining
block inner leaf
partial cavity insulation
air space

Cavity partially filled with insulation



Timber frame external wall construction

- Fire precautions: timber framed homes are designed to the same fire resistance standards as masonry homes.

  Do not use a blowlamp or other high temperature source of heat in, or close to, any hole in the outer brick leaf or the inner plasterboard lining.

- Vapour control: if you cut a hole in the internal plasterboard lining of the external wall, you may puncture the vapour control layer. This layer may be a separate sheet of polythene or the backing of the plasterboard. It is designed to prevent water vapour from inside the home reaching the timber frame. So, if you do make a hole in it, you should seal it up again with tape or another suitable material.

Internal walls
Internal walls can be built of blocks, from timber frames or using proprietary partition panels. Blockwork walls can be finished with plaster or plasterboard dry lining. Timber framed walls and proprietary partition panels are finished with plasterboard.

Some internal walls are load-bearing, so do not remove them – or make substantial alterations to them – without getting professional advice.

Separating ('party') walls
Walls used to separate semi-detached or terraced houses or flats are designed to reduce the passage of sound and provide a fire barrier.

In masonry construction, separating walls may be built from bricks or blocks with solid or cavity construction and finished with plaster or plasterboard.

In timber framed homes, the separating wall is also timber framed. It may be finished with extra layers of plasterboard and incorporate sound absorbent material.

Whichever method is used, you should not reduce the thickness of the wall or make holes in the plasterboard lining, for example, to install an extra power point or recess a bookshelf. This may reduce its sound insulation and fire resistance. In England and Wales, work on separating walls may also be subject to the Party Wall etc. Act 1996.
(See Appendix C, 'Contacts and references'.)

Garage walls
The external walls of garages are often constructed from a single thickness of brickwork. It is important to note that these may not be waterproof in all weather conditions, e.g. prolonged driving rain.

Appendix B: Newly converted or renovated homes

If you have decided to purchase a newly converted or renovated home, you may have done so for the character and charm such properties offer.

Converting an existing building into a new home can breathe new life into the local area and is often encouraged by local planning authorities and English Heritage. But ensuring the successful transition from a former use to residential, or upgrading an older home (whilst retaining the original character), will present designers and builders with many challenges.

Converted properties may retain elements of former use and, as a result, their ability to function today will be dependent on past history. The structures and materials used in older properties were designed to be more flexible than modern buildings and, consequently, movement may have taken place over many years, resulting in a degree of distortion in alignment, level and plumb. This will have been taken into account at the conversion design stage and should not affect the performance of the building.

Whilst the overall integrity and weatherproofing of the property should be robust, natural aging of materials, which may involve some wear of surfaces, is a normal feature of many conversions and renovations.

Where existing windows, doors and surrounds have been retained, they may operate less smoothly than new units, and you may find:

- blemishes and undulations in surface finishes
- scratches and marks in glazing.

Where floors and stairs have been retained, you may find:

- the effects of movement over many years – the floors may not be level and can be uneven
- retained staircases may not follow the guidance of the current Building Regulations
- some additional shrinkage and possible squeaking of floors may occur as the building dries out (to a greater degree than may have been the case during its former use)
- variable ceiling heights (retained features may lower the height still further in specific areas).

Due to the converted building's age and previous use, it may not have been designed to restrict the passage of sound and thermal transmission to the levels required under current Building Regulations. Whilst some improvement in sound and thermal insulation will have been incorporated, the Building Regulations do recognise that it may not be possible to achieve the standards expected for new build in all circumstances.

The tolerances and finishes given in Chapter 1.2 of NHBC Standards do not apply to the retained elements of a conversion.

Appendix C: Contacts and reference numbers

NHBC
Buildmark Claims & Guidance

Tel: 0800 035 6422 Email: claims@nhbc.co.uk

www.nhbc.co.uk/homeowners

Gas and oil

Gas Safe Register

The Gas Safe Register is the official list of gas engineers who are registered to work safely and legally on gas appliances in the United Kingdom, Isle of Man and Guernsey.

Check the register, find a registered gas engineer and receive guidance/advice on gas safety.

Tel: 0800 408 5500
Email: enquiries@gassaferegister.co.uk

www.gassaferegister.co.uk

National Gas Emergency Service (natural gas)

Smell gas? Act quickly.

England, Scotland and Wales 0800 111 999
Northern Ireland 0800 002 001
Isle of Man 0808 1624 444

HETAS Ltd

HETAS is the official body recognised by government to approve biomass and solid fuel domestic heating appliances, fuels and services, including the registration of competent installers and servicing businesses.

Find a product, retailer, installer, quality assured fuels, chimney sweeps, etc.

Tel: 01684 278170 Email: info@hetas.co.uk

www.hetas.co.uk

OFTEC

OFTEC represents the oil heating and cooking industry in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Its aim is to be the leading trade association and technician registration body for the liquid fuel heating and cooking sector, and for complementary renewable energy technologies.

Tel: 0845 6585 181 Email: enquiries@oftec.org

www.oftec.co.uk

Electricity

NICEIC

NICEIC is the UK's leading voluntary regulatory body for the electrical contracting industry. It has been assessing the electrical competence of electricians for over 50 years and currently maintains a roll of over 26,000 registered contractors.

Check the register, find a registered electrician and receive guidance/advice on electrical safety.

Tel: 01582 531 000 Email: enquiries@niceic.com

www.niceic.com

ECA

Founded in 1901, the ECA is the UK's leading trade association representing the interests of contractors who design, install, inspect, test and maintain electrical and electronic equipment and services.

Tel: 020 7313 4800
Email: electricalcontractors@eca.co.uk

www.eca.co.uk

Building Regulations, advice and guidance

RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects)

RIBA champions better buildings, communities and the environment. It provides standards, training, support and recognition for its members. Membership of RIBA is recognised the world over as a symbol of professional excellence among both clients and architects.

Tel: 020 7580 5533 Email: info@riba.org

www.architecture.com

RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors)

RICS is an international professional body with over 100,000 members. It regulates and promotes the profession; maintains the highest educational and professional standards; protects clients and consumers via a strict code of ethics; and provides impartial advice and guidance.

Tel: 0247 686 8555 Email: contactrics@rics.org

www.rics.org

Government Planning Portal (England & Wales)

The Planning Portal is the UK Government's comprehensive online planning and Building Regulations resource for England and Wales.

www.planningportal.gov.uk

Guide to the planning system in Scotland (ISBN 978 0 7559 9064 1)

This brochure can be downloaded from the Scottish Government website

www.scotland.gov.uk/publications

The Party Wall etc. Act 1996: revised explanatory booklet (Department for Communities and Local Government)

The booklet can be downloaded from the UK Government website

www.gov.uk/government/publications

TRUSTMARK

TrustMark is a not for profit organisation, licensed by Government and supported by consumer protection groups.

Find your local tradesmen trustworthy, reliable and operating to Government Endorsed Standards

Tel: 0333 555 1234
Email: info@trustmark.org.uk

www.trustmark.org.uk

Notes

Visit **www.nhbc.co.uk**
or call **0800 035 6422**

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or call **0800 035 6422**

NHBC, NHBC House, Davy Avenue, Knowlhill, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK5 8FP

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